United Nations ECE/CES/2015/14/Add.5

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
16 June 2015

English only

Economic Commission for Europe

Conference of European Statisticians

Sixty-third plenary session
Geneva, 15-17 June 2015
Item 7 (a) of the provisional agenda
Reports on the work of the Conference of European Statisticians, its Bureau and Teams of Specialists

Implementation of the UNECE Statistical Programme 2014

Note by the Secretariat

Addendum

Report of the 9th SPECA Project Working Group on Statistics (PWGS)

Summary

The State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) jointly organized the 9th meeting of the SPECA PWG on Statistics in Baku, Azerbaijan, from 25 to 27 June 2014.

The document presents the outcome of the meeting *"Environmental Information Systems: from Environmental Indicators to the System of Environment-Economic Accounting"* (SEEA) addressed the call of the Rio+20 Summit (A/RES/66/288) and post-2015 agenda to provide support to governments in integrating relevant data into national statistics for monitoring sustainable development in all its dimensions and in particular for the green growth/economy and the preservation of ecosystems.

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I. Summary of the meeting

1. The State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) jointly organized the 9th meeting of the SPECA PWG on Statistics in Baku, Azerbaijan, from 25 to 27 June 2014. This event also benefited from the participation and substantive contributions from Statistics Norway, TurkStat, Eurostat, the Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-STAT) and the Institute Cadaster (Russian Federation).

2. The topic of the meeting, Environmental Information Systems: from Environmental Indicators to the System of Environment-Economic Accounting (SEEA) addressed the call of the Rio+20 Summit (A/RES/66/288) and post-2015 agenda to provide support to governments in integrating relevant data into national statistics for monitoring sustainable development in all its dimensions and in particular for the green growth/economy and the preservation of ecosystems. This topic also responded to recommendations provided in Global Assessments of National Statistical Systems in the sub-region and the request of SPECA countries formulated in the 8th SPECA PWGS meeting to discuss prospects and challenges in the implementation of the SEEA.

3. The meeting was targeted towards Heads of national statistical offices/committees (NSOs) and Directors of environment/energy statistics of SPECA countries and Mongolia and was attended by representatives from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and, for the very first time, Afghanistan. In total, 35 experts from official statistics (producers) and ministries (users) participated (see attached list of participants).

4. The meeting was organized into 4 substantive sessions and one dedicated to the coordination of technical cooperation activities in the field of statistics. The agenda of the meeting, contributions and background documents can be found on the UNECE webpage: http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2014.06.speca.html.

5. The main outcome and conclusions of the 4 substantive sessions of the 9th SPECA PWGS meeting are the following:

(a) Raw and processed data for environment comes from multiple sources inside but even more often outside NSOs and therefore compilation of environment statistics and SEEA needs coordination of all data providers and producers of official statistics. Participants discussed current institutional arrangements across national statistical systems and identified several possibilities for addressing coordination challenges. In particular, it was generally agreed that establishing national environmental-economic accounts working groups involving users and data producers would be an important step. It was noted that the establishment of working groups at the national level would help create a common responsibility for the environmental-economic accounts and help to improve harmonization of data collection methods (e.g. methodology and classifications) across the statistical system. National working groups were also identified as an important tool for clarifying the roles for the various key stake-holders such as NSOs, relevant ministries and other providers of environment data. It is therefore essential to identify all existing data sources and stakeholders involved at the different stages of production processes. In some cases, relations and data exchange among stakeholders need to be specified through legislation or memoranda of

understanding. However, it was stressed that NSOs must remain the coordinators of environmental information systems.

(b) Compilation of SEEA requires a foundation of both environment data/statistics but also economic statistics such as the System of National Accounts (SNA). The Working Group recognized SEEA as a tool for further integrating and improving coherence of environment statistics that eventually can be used for many different analytical purposes. But SEEA implies a need for NSOs to find creative ways to link knowledge and experience related to the SNA with knowledge and experience related to producing data and statistics on the environment, energy, water, etc. The ultimate aim of this integration effort is the production of environmental information systems which support sustainable development policies of the countries. Modernization of statistical production, streamlining production processes and rearranging data collection in the way that information harvested can be used for multiple purposes can benefit significantly to the production of environment statistics.

(c) Participants acknowledged the importance of establishing priorities, such as SEEA modules, in order to focus resources towards a programme that can be sustained for producing a regular time series and involving continuous improvements to data quality. Priorities will differ according to national circumstances, but water and energy were recurring themes during the meeting that are likely to be among the initial priority modules for SEEA implementation for SPECA countries. Ratio indicators to show energy, water or emissions efficiencies/effectiveness are some of the first types of results when combining economic with physical data. Also for environmental indicators, it was proposed to focus on a set of international core indicators that would cover national requirements and most of the indicators requested internationally (e.g. UNECE indicators for EECCA environment monitoring and assessment).

(d) SPECA countries also stressed the importance of technical support from international and bilateral partners during the process of the implementation of the SEEA. Increased training opportunities will be an important input once national priority compilations are identified. Participants also agreed that opportunities for SPECA countries to share experiences with each other on how technical challenges have been overcome would be one of the best ways for building capacities. Targeted international seminars and training workshops involving technical experts from the SPECA region but also beyond could be useful as follow-up activities in the future in order to revisit some of the recommendations, solutions and challenges discussed during the 9th SPECA PWGS. It was agreed that this meeting should be considered as a "kick-off" for further activities in this specific domain and should not be restricted to SPECA countries.

(e) Another critical action point towards implementation of the SEEA and enhanced consistency and accuracy of environment statistics relates to advocacy among existing but also potential users. Participants acknowledged that advocacy is a task that could benefit from assistance from international and bilateral partners by facilitating preparation and exchange of advocacy materials, including examples of best practices for SEEA implementation and practical case studies of their applications for policy-relevant analysis.

(f) To conclude, participants insisted on the fact that National Strategies for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) and related reviews and assessments should pay more attention to environment statistics and accounts.

6. The last session of the meeting (session 5) was dedicated to the coordination of technical cooperation activities in the SPECA region and in particular projects and programmes supporting the implementation of recommendations provided in Global Assessment reports of national statistical systems. In order to enhance effectiveness and efficiency of these activities, organizing institutions stressed the importance for partner countries to provide information on the annual donor coordination survey and the questionnaire on the follow-up of the implementation of improvement recommendations from the global assessments, both developed by Eurostat and UNECE. The main objectives of these surveys are to be able to properly plan technical assistance activities, to coordinate these activities and thus to avoid overlapping activities and gaps. UNECE insisted on the fact that the participation in these surveys is a prerequisite for the successful implementation of the 9th tranche of the UNDA project: Strengthening National Capacities for the Sustainable Development of Statistics.

7. The main outcome and conclusions of this session were the following:

(a) Beneficiary countries welcomed the UNDA project that would support their efforts to implement the recommendations of Global Assessments. Participants also insisted on the importance to link this project with other international and bilateral ongoing or planned initiatives (e.g. Eurostat, EFTA, ESCAP, WB, IMF, UNDP, UNFPA, and CIS-STAT).

(b) At the request of countries which are not covered by the UNDA project (Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan) it was decided that technical assistance and additional funds from partner organizations would be mobilized to fully integrate them in this project. Mongolia also mentioned its interest to participate. It is also expected that Belarus would like to join. Ideally, the project should encompass all EECCA countries and Mongolia.

(c) Participants acknowledged the importance of participating in the 2 surveys (coordination and follow-up) for the efficient planning and implementation of all technical cooperation activities and not only the UNDA project. Some countries in the SPECA region still do not participate and it was agreed that the way to improve coverage and accuracy of these surveys would be further discussed in the High-level Seminar for EECCA countries organized by Eurostat (with participation of EFTA and UNECE) in September 2014 in Chisinau (Moldova).

8. Participants thanked the organizers and the hosting country for the excellent organization of the meeting and the very constructive discussions and exchange of experience. It was agreed that the 10th SPECA PWGS meeting would take place in Geneva in June 2015, back-to-back with the 63rd plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians (15-19 June 2015).

9. The material of the meeting is available at http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2014.06.speca.html.